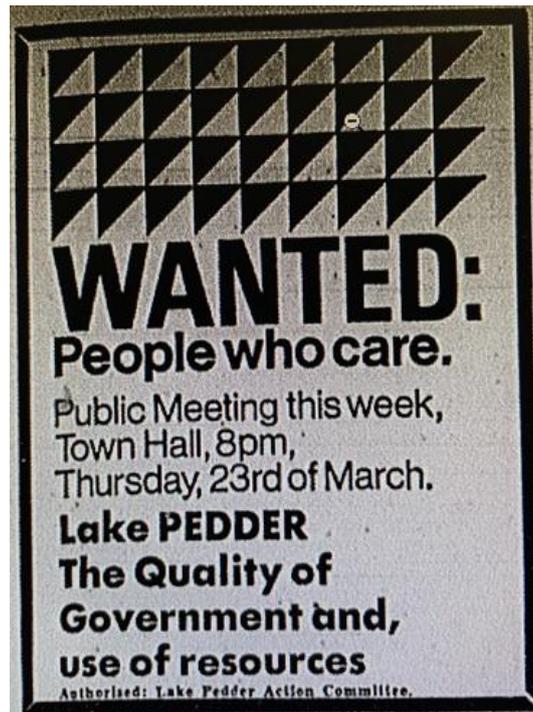


The Election Fight for Lake Pedder – March-April 1972

Much has been written about the Lake Pedder Action Committee and the overall fight to save the doomed lake. However, there is little about the workings of the UTG's first election campaign.

On the 21st March, the same day as the writs for the election were issued, this advertisement appeared in The Mercury



As people who had walked on the sands of Lake Pedder, Kay and I really had no choice but to attend the meeting, which no matter how late in the process was worth a last ditch effort to save a wondrous place.

At this point there was no indication to outside supporters of the Save Lake Pedder Action Committee and to the general public that the meeting was called to form a new political party. However in retrospect the first public use of triangles logo, modified for the UTG, indicated that a lot of organizational work had occurred in the background.

The Wikipedia entry states "The party was formed on 23 March 1972, during a meeting of the Lake Pedder Action Committee (LPAC) at the Hobart Town Hall in order to field political candidates in the April 1972 state election." For those of us who were supporters and not part of LPAC this did not appear to be strictly true.

At the packed meeting there were presentations and contributions from various people. As I recall the only direct mention of the formation of the new green party came from Dick Jones and there was no formal motion to form the United Tasmania Group. However, the following motion was presented and passed by acclamation.

"In order that there is a maximum usage of a unique political opportunity to save Lake Pedder, now an issue of national and global concern, and to implement a national, well researched conservation plan for the State of Tasmania, there be formed a Single Independent Coalition of primarily conservation-oriented candidates and their supporters."¹

The Tasmanian election date had been set for the 22nd April. Few had previously expected the election so early, but the government instability led to a precipitous early election. The Hare-Clarke system meant that theoretically at least one or more candidate supporters of halting the flooding of Lake Pedder could be elected.

There had been an expectation that the crippled Bethune government would carry on for at least few months, though on 15th March, Kevin Lyons had resigned as Deputy Premier and effectively dissolved the Liberal-Centre coalition. It was hoped that Lyons would at least support the government on crucial votes. However, a few days later, Dr Nigel Abbott, the former Health Minister threatened to resign and Bethune's house of cards came tumbling down, triggering the election.

With that in mind there was an urgent call for people to join a political action group in readiness for the election. Sitting quietly in the centre of the hall, I did not anticipate I would be called. Someone, and I still don't know who, said "I nominate Roy Pallett". The next call was "Are you prepared to join this committee?" Of course in that situation with about 600 people expecting action, how could I refuse?

Pamela Walker contends that the people involved were largely 'politically inexperienced', which was true. I had at least run two political campaign, one an almost win in Denison at the 1969 federal election and a successful state-wide senate campaign in 1970. This lack of political experience in the group later proved to be frustrating and debilitating for the political campaign.

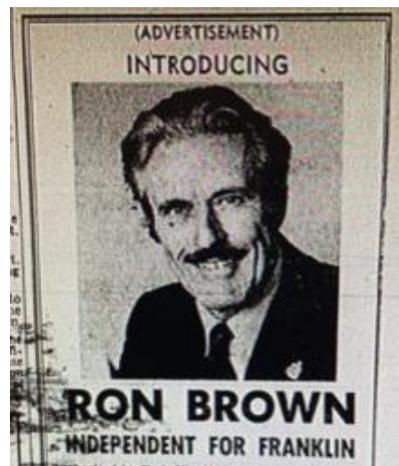
Initially meetings of the political action group started well with regular gatherings at Dick Jones' little backyard office in Greenlands Avenue, Sandy Bay. Other members included Norman Laird, Garth Manning and John Greenhill and a couple of others whose names escape me.

¹ <https://eprints.utas.edu.au/22626/2/Pamela%20Walker%20whole%20thesis.pdf> - page 11

It was clear that Dick had done a lot of background work for the United Tasmania Group and in many respects had prepared for its operations in an election.

The realization then was that the only hope of succeeding in the coming election was to get one or two candidates elected and to hold the balance of power and then to persuade one of the major parties to support the anti-flooding of Lake Pedder. Admittedly a long shot.

Ron Brown, the former member for Huon in the Legislative Council had decided to move to the House of Assembly as an independent and had inserted a small advertisement in the Mercury on the 21st March:



He was very much in favour of saving Lake Pedder and it was relatively easy to persuade to join the UTG team.

Bass

Walter Austin
Jeffrey Weston
Julia Weston

Denison

Norman Laird
Alfred White
Ian Milne
Kelvin Scott

Wilmot – No candidates

Braddon

Noreen Batchelor
Anthony Weston

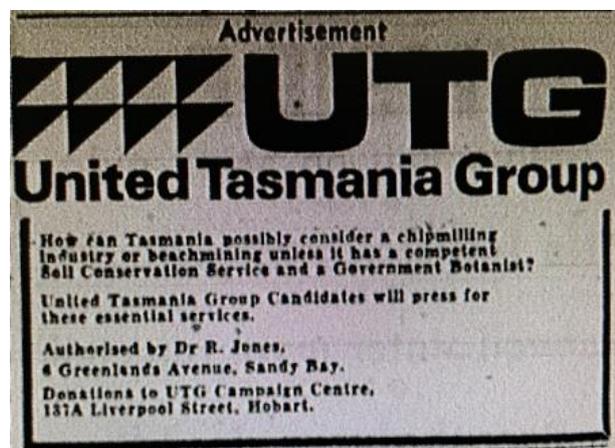
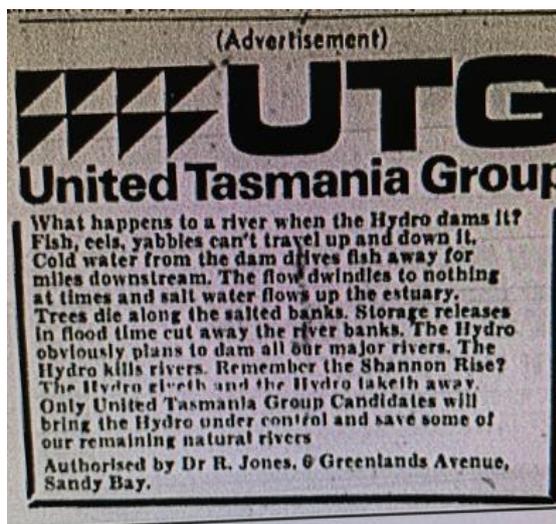
Franklin

Ron Brown
Rod Broadby
Brenda Hean

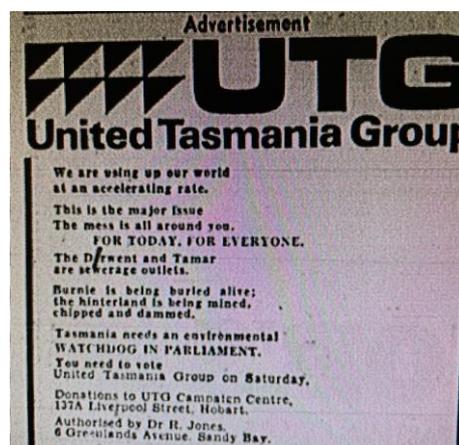
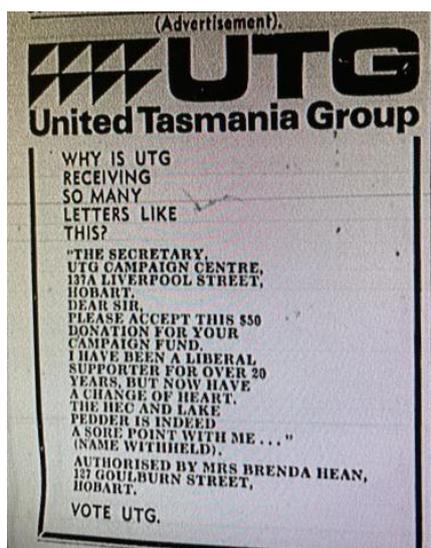
It was gratifying that a large number of people had quickly put their names forward as candidates when realistically virtually none had any chance of being elected. The issue of Lake Pedder drew many to try to do something about it.

Franklin and Denison had the best hope of success. Franklin had one proven candidate and two well-known names. In Denison the best known name was Sir Alfred White who had earlier been a minister in a Labor government and then was the state's Agent General in London. Even though he had not been in parliament for a few years, it was thought that he might drag a few votes, but in the end did not poll as well as Norman Laird who headed the UTG ticket.

Getting the candidates was one thing; adequately campaigning for them was another. Initial campaign advertisements were not encouraging.



Dick Jones and others insisted on persevering with this style, because the issues were important to them - but they were not vote winners.



The UTG's (Dick Jones) overly wordy advertisements continued throughout the campaign, with the exception of one advertisement with the photos of candidates.

UTG
United Tasmania Group

The United Tasmania Group has been formed because legislators past and present have failed to understand and act upon the necessity for conservation of the environment. Tasmania is also in a crisis due to gross over-employment on home-economics. Population has declined and Tasmania's share of the work force has not increased. It is imperative that the State embark on a new-life economy.

UTG were not set to be held into a sense of false security which would threaten your standard of living, freedom, and the quality of life in Tasmania.

Authorised by Dr R. Jones, 4 Greenlands Ave, Sandy Bay.

NORMAN LAIRD. Professor of Bionics, 25 years. Tasmanian representative with Australian Antarctic Research Expedition, Co-ordinator South West Tasmania Memorial Hospital, RAAF.

IAN MELNE. Technical expert in electronics. Developed original equipment for use in tracking space satellites. Chairman Blackmans Bay Progress Association. Active in musical singing. Long-standing interests in bushwalking.

DENISON
WELYN SCOTT. Bachelor of Laws. Former member of University Council. All Australian Universities representative in debating and badminton.

MIR ALFRED WHITE. Minister for the Crown 15 years. Agent-General in London 10 1/2 years. Incorporated retail, rail-off, fitness clubs Australia. Long-time campaigner for change air laws in Tasmania.

BOB BROADBY. Computer Programmer. Ex-Teacher Hobart Technical College. Foundation secretary. Lake Pedder Action Committee. Young man with 3 children. Holds a dramatic science diploma. Formerly trained mind in war on selected areas of government.

RON BROWN. Secretary-Manager, Apple and Pear Growers' Federation. Bachelor of Commerce and qualified Accountant. Deputy President Legislative Council 1974-8. Ex-Chairman, South West National Park Board. Member Hobart Legatey.

BRENDA HEAN. Counsellor Tasmanian Conservation Trust. Secretary Tasmanian Music Teachers' Association. Member, Board of Management, Holy Church. Foundation member Hobart Arts Club. Executive member Lake Pedder Action Committee.

Even that one is too wordy and complicated. Overall the candidates were not well served. Dick, being an idealist and stubborn to boot, had made up his mind and did not want to listen to both friendly criticisms and campaign suggestions from me.

ADVERTISEMENT.

UTG
United Tasmania Group

OUR FISHING INDUSTRY
A long established scallop fishery destroyed.
Crayfish becoming scarce.
How long will abalone last?
Hobart — a Japanese fishing port?
And did you know that a single Tasmanian fishing unit requires up to 20 licences costing hundreds of dollars. It takes up to 4 days merely to lodge the applications!
UTG Candidates will help Tasmanian fishermen rescue their industry.
Authorised by Dr R. Jones, 6 Greenlands Ave, Sandy Bay.
Donations to campaign centre, 137A Liverpool Street, Hobart.

8—THE MERCURY, THURSDAY, 20.4.1972

Advertisement

THE INSTABILITY DEADLOCK BOGEY

Of course, the Major Parties wall "INSTABILITY." They don't want you to vote UTG.

They don't want a Ginger Group in Parliament.

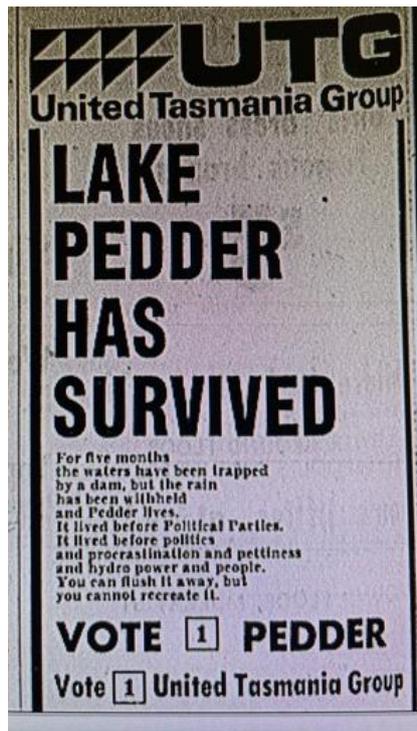
Would you believe that historically, Tasmania has had one of the most stable governments on Earth — even if it has been a little sleepy.

Be a devil.

Rock their boat, just a bit With a UTG vote.

Donations to UTG Campaign Centre, 137A Liverpool St, Hobart.
Authorised by Dr R. Jones, 6 Greenlands Ave, Sandy Bay.

UTG
United Tasmania Group



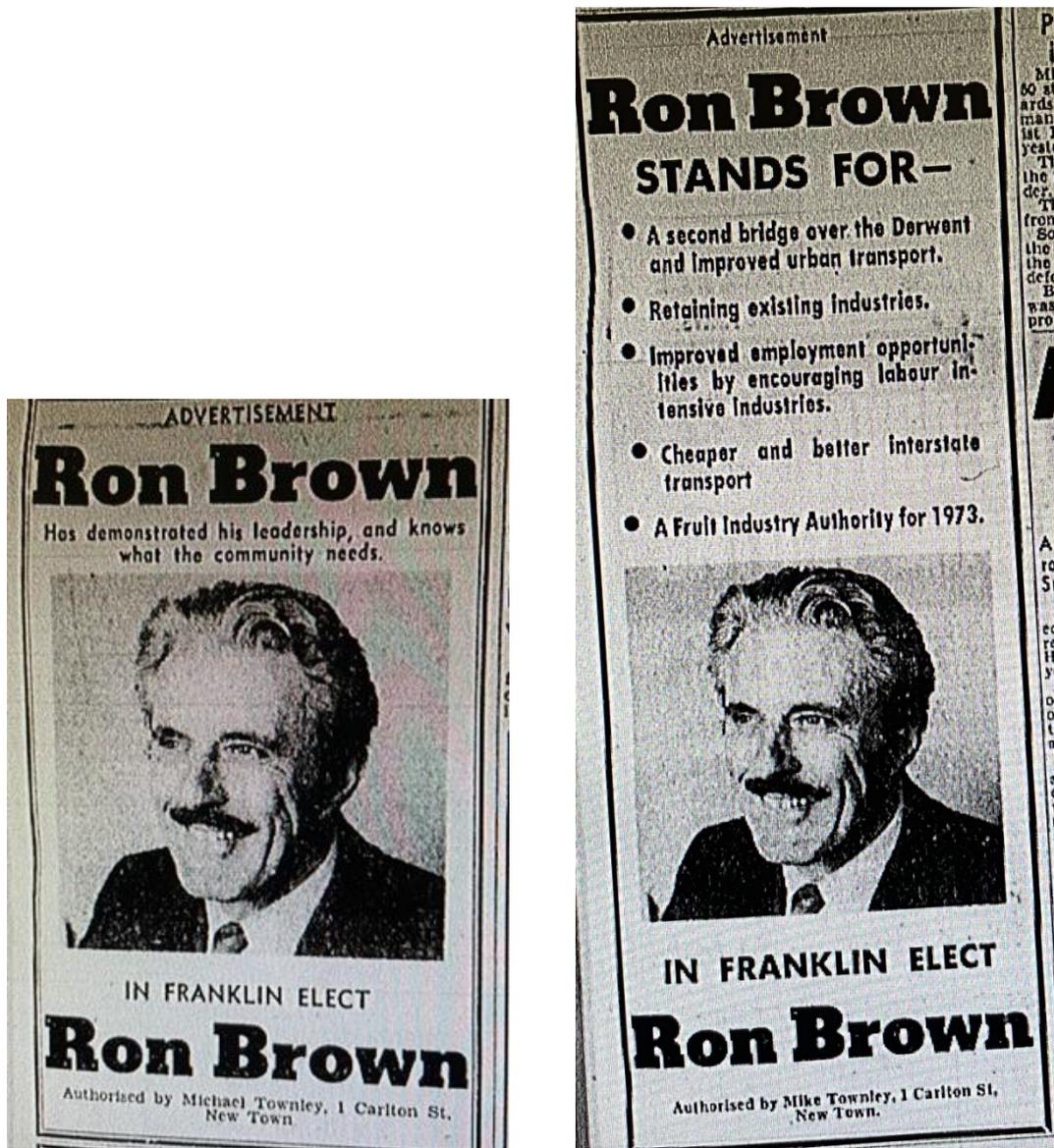
Apart from one attempt (above), the UTG did not promote its candidates. Dick Jones was intent on getting his various messages across, largely to the detriment of candidates. As a very new group on the political scene, the United Tasmania Group was never going to register as a group or party with the voters in the way that the Labor and Liberal parties do. Voters will not vote for a new, unproven group name, only for solid candidates with a high recognition factor – and this needed a strong personal campaign. The Save Lake Pedder campaign was strong, but did not have the clout and widespread in the community support to counter the promotions by Labor and the HEC.

The best chance for the UTG's electoral success was with Ron Brown and Brenda Hean in Franklin. If the UTG had supported them properly the likelihood of one candidate being elected would have improved. No matter how hard I tried with Dick, he would not deviate from his 'message' campaign and would not support the candidates in the way they deserved in the campaign.

As much as I appreciated the need for a new green party and the building work for the party that was going on with the committee, the immediate need for candidate support was my main concern. We had been nominated at the Town Hall meeting to conduct a political campaign to save Lake Pedder and this was not being done. The net result was that I pulled back from meeting attendance as my campaign experience was not being used.

A few days later, both Ron Brown and Brenda Hean came separately to my place in Bellerive, despairing at the lack of support from the UTG group. "Please help, Roy. Dick and his group have left us high and dry" was the essence of their pleas.

With less than 10 days left before the election, the Lake Pedder cause was effectively lost. However, as a desperate last measure I devised very simple advertisements to improve candidate recognition, two for Ron and one for Brenda with good photos and high profile authorizations at the bottom of the ads.



Ron's ads in particular were not anti-UTG, but the candidate needed to re-establish an identity with the electorate, making it easy to be found on the ballot paper and to show that he was more than just a one issue candidate – something that Dick was reluctant to let candidates do.



To reiterate, the Wikipedia entry says “The party was formed on 23 March 1972, during a meeting of the Lake Pedder Action Committee (LPAC) at the Hobart Town Hall in order to field political candidates in the April 1972 state election.”

“The group received 3.9% of the state wide vote and came within 200 votes of winning a seat (in Franklin).” This margin is referring to the cut-up of preferences. The margin is small and very frustrating. Ron Brown was a strong candidate and should have won the seat, thus making the debut of the UTG more auspicious.

Overall as it turned out the election result was not close, so the UTG would not have held the balance of power. The Liberal Party was routed winning only 14 seats to the ALP’s 21. Electric Eric got his wish and Lake Pedder was lost.

My belief is that the whole UTG campaign could have been a lot better and a lot more effective. All I can say is that I tried, but ultimately failed. For Ron Brown, things could have been worse, within two years he replaced Royce Neville as Agent-General in London. Not a bad second prize. Brenda’s loss was appalling

Our aims were different. Mine was focussed on the short term of getting people elected. Dick had a much more long term objective – forming the first Green Party in the world and this was the significant achievement from that time.

Roy Pallett

July 2021